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ART. IV. — *Dictionary of Americanisms ; a Glossary of Words and Phrases, usually regarded as peculiar to the United States.* By JOHN RUSSELL BARTLETT, Corresponding Secretary of the American Ethnographical Society, &c. New York : Bartlett & Welford. 1848.

WITHOUT going so far as the old lady, who declared that a dictionary was very delightful reading, owing to the great regularity with which the words were arranged, and to the ease of understanding them on account of the copious definitions of their meaning, we confess that a dictionary is by no means the most tedious book that reviewers are obliged to examine. In one of these ponderous records of a language we find no slight indication of the taste and intellectual spirit of the nation which uses it. In a dictionary of archaisms and provincialisms, we have revealed quite as plainly the whims and oddities, the local customs and prejudices, the political and religious strifes, the partial knowledge, and perverse ignorance of the uneducated multitude. It is no unfruitful study for those who would understand the habits and temper of a people, to find out the origin and uses of watchwords and proverbs, and the causes of the perversion of legitimate expressions.

Mr. Bartlett's volume is far the most complete glossary of Americanisms that has yet been published. We hail it as a sign of attention paid to a subject of some importance, which we have a thousand temptations to forget or neglect. Since the valuable vocabulary by Mr. Pickering, no very serious attempt has been made to collect our peculiar forms of speech. We are aware of the obstacles in the way of the undertaking ; how difficult it is to fix very rigidly the limits to such a work ; what extensive observation, and that too, of a peculiar kind, and what varied reading, are required to make it even tolerably complete. We are not surprised, then, at occasional omissions even of familiar peculiarities, nor at occasional insertions of words which are, at best, of rare use. We doubt sometimes how far the authorities upon which Mr. Bartlett depends indicate the real usage of the people. In depicting the strange manners and odd expressions, either of Yankees or of settlers in the far West, the writer who wishes to tell a

piquant story is almost irresistibly tempted to color the picture very highly. Many of our American oddities, we suspect, have no better origin than the fancy of such writers. One might travel for a lifetime in search of a Sam Slick, or even a Jack Downing, without finding either.

But were Mr. Bartlett's book not half as complete and well arranged as it is, we should still be very thankful for it. While it places on record a great many singular idioms, slang phrases, and uncommon expressions, it also shows how small a part of the whole are of American origin, and of those which are, how very few have the sanction of good use. Notwithstanding the diligence of our author, and the variety of sources from which he drew his materials, the number of words is greatly exceeded by the most recent English glossaries. Halliwell's "Dictionary of Archaic and Provincial Words," published in London in 1847, contains more than fifty thousand words. A writer in the *Edinburgh Review*, a few years since, estimated the number of provincialisms in the colloquial tongue of the lower classes at "fifty-nine thousand words which can, for the chief part, produce proofs of legitimate origin; about the same number, in short, of authorized words that are admitted into Todd's edition of Johnson's dictionary."

Besides accomplishing his main purpose, Mr. Bartlett has certainly made a very entertaining book for a winter evening. The illustrations of political watchwords are chosen with great adroitness, and the sly humor which often gleams through the becoming gravity of the lexicographer would win a smile even from a political opponent. In proof, we may refer our readers to the articles, *loco foco*, *constructive-mileage*, *nullification*, *native-American*, and *defining one's position*. Nor are our political follies the only ones which are here chronicled and chastised by ridicule.

The tone of English criticism respecting the United States was, unhappily, for a long time, neither candid nor generous. It was denied that we had either the "accent of Christian," or the "gait of Christian." We were degenerating in language as rapidly as in every thing else. Every English traveller in America seemed to think it his duty to bring back, among other novelties, a fresh batch of barbarisms and vulgarisms; and these were charged, not upon the classes who

used them, if anybody did, but upon the whole people. It is gratifying to observe, that foreign criticism is fast becoming more just and genial. From the severity of English criticism, however, we derived some benefit. Our scholars began thoroughly to examine how far we were justly chargeable with corrupting the king's English, and our writers probably became more careful of sanctioning unauthorized words and phrases. About the close of the last century, Dr. Wither-
spoon, in the fifth number of *The Druid*, used the following language: — "I shall also admit, though with some hesitation, that gentlemen and scholars in Great Britain speak as much with the vulgar in common chitchat, as persons of the same class do in America; but there is a remarkable difference in their public and solemn discourses. I have heard in this country in the senate, at the bar, and from the pulpit, and see daily in dissertations from the press, errors in grammar, improprieties and vulgarisms, which hardly any person of the same class, in point of rank and literature, would have fallen into in Great Britain." More than thirty years ago, Mr. Pickering, in a paper communicated to the American Academy, gave it as his deliberate conclusion, "that although the language of the United States has, perhaps, changed less than might have been expected, when we consider how many years have elapsed since our ancestors brought it from England; yet it has in so many instances departed from the English standard, that our scholars should lose no time in endeavoring to restore it to its purity, and to prevent future corruption."

In order to determine the relative purity of speech in the two countries, the usage of Parliament has sometimes been compared with that of Congress. But we think the comparison unfair for evident reasons. Our representatives are often taken from a class in society which is seldom able to send a delegate to the English legislature. Parliament, it has been said, is mainly composed of Lords and of those who are to be Lords — Lords *in esse* and Lords *in posse* — of the best bred and best educated persons in the kingdom. Besides, the *insanabile loquendi cacoëthes* is more prevalent here than there. In England, the stout country gentleman, from whose honest lips a provincialism might, now and then, slip unheeded, thinks that he performs his duty if he patiently

endures the debate, and votes with his party; speaking he leaves to the leaders. With us, a representative is expected not only to study the subjects of legislation carefully, and to vote wisely and independently, but to perpetrate at least one speech to—his constituents, if not to the House. Amidst so much speaking, from men of more action than education, from men living two thousand miles apart, in different climates and with different manners, is it to be wondered at that strange literary enormities should be occasionally committed, the criminal all the while being quite unconscious of guilt, or, if aware of the law, willing to show his independence by practical nullification? If any comparison is to be made, it should be between the same classes in the two countries; between English and American scholars, or the English and American people. From the mistakes of our public men, however, it is as natural that imputations should rest upon our use of language, as that imputations upon our manners should spring from acts of rudeness (to use no stronger word) in the legislative halls.

But it is of far more consequence to be aware of our dangers, than to be able to compare ourselves favorably with another nation; and although we may doubt whether the remark of Dr. Witherspoon would apply to our writers at the present time, the caution of Mr. Pickering has not yet lost its force.

American scholars should watch the purity of their mother tongue with a care proportioned to the dangers to which it is here exposed. One reason for exercising this watchfulness is to be found in that extension of our territorial limits to which we have already referred. It is true, that west of the Alleghanies, there are now few literary men whose writings will hereafter be standards; but there are politicians, and orators, and preachers; there are governments, too, whose state papers and public documents are among the precedents entitled to authority in the republic of letters. Corruptions of language do not come at once into general use; they creep in stealthily. They often spring from ignorance or caprice; then they do some service in an humble way in the market or the courts, ministering to the wants of the poor and ignorant; then they attract the favor of the press in its least authoritative form; and finally, partly by assumption and partly from

necessity, they come to be acknowledged as good citizens and freeholders of the realm. Now, since these creatures of low and foreign birth have such advantages of access from the very extent of our frontier, it becomes us to be careful that they gain no undue advantage over the freeborn natives.

Another reason why we should be jealous of our language is, that we have no authoritative guardians of it, constituted either by law or fashion. We have no metropolis, no court, no learned order, no academy. Usage, to be sure, is the law of language, but usage, of course, within certain restrictions; not the usage of the majority, but of the learned; not usage reckoned from the origin of the tongue, but of the present day; not provincial, but national. To determine all this easily and readily, England appeals to her scholars and to the court, as by presumption affording the best authority; while France and Italy depend much upon their academies. London, to be sure, has its cockneyisms; but London, for a portion of the year, contains the wealth, fashion, and elegant society of the whole kingdom. Liverpool and Manchester, York and Bristol, always yield to its authority. We have no single city to control by its laws the speech of the nation. We *reckon*, we *guess*, we *expect*, we *calculate*, in defiance of Boston or New York, Cincinnati or Charleston. We profess, indeed, to be as obedient to the laws as any good citizens can be; but the police is not very active, and it may be a long time after the offence is committed before we receive, by a peculiar tap on the shoulder and the exhibition of the staff of office, an intimation that we are held amenable to the broken statute.

A third reason for care may be found in the fact that newspapers have with us so extensive a circulation, and constitute almost the sole literature of large classes of people. The first printed corruptions of the language will be apt to find their way into the daily and weekly journals. Now this would be of little moment, were it not that many of the persons whose early reading has not gone much beyond the newspapers may be promoted, in a government like ours, to places of responsibility, and thus may themselves become prominent violators of the laws of our tongue.

Again, the heterogeneous nature of our population in some portions of the country exposes the language to corruption.

When a score of nations, each with its own dialect, unite to make up our population, some effect must be produced on our language; some peculiar threads will be found after a while interwoven with the national web. The ear will no longer be delicate in detecting mispronunciations; the quick apprehension of barbarisms and solecisms will be lost. Even now, the West takes a pride in its not very elegant dialects. It demands of its popular speakers free manners and bold words; it feels its political importance, is conscious of its exhaustless resources, and, naturally enough, cares as little for the canons of verbal criticism as for the authority of the English parliament. This region has already proved a fruitful source of *American* peculiarities. The Dutch in New York, the Germans in Pennsylvania, the Welsh in both these States, the Norwegians in Illinois, the Spanish in Florida, the French in Louisiana, have already imparted a hue to the English in contact with them.

“If a few Dutch colonists,” says Mr. Bartlett, “mingled with the English, have been able to engraft so many words on our language, what may we expect from the hundreds of thousands of Germans in the State of Pennsylvania? There the German language will doubtless exist for centuries; for although they are situated in the midst of an English-speaking population far more numerous than themselves, and although the government and laws are conducted through the English language, still the tendency of a people of common origin to cling together,—the publication of newspapers, almanacs, and books in German,—and the cultivation to some extent of German literature, will tend to preserve the idiom and nationality of the people. It is true, the language is already much corrupted, and in the course of time it must give way to the English; but it will leave behind it an almost imperishable dialect as a memento of its existence. In the State of Ohio, where there are large settlements of Germans, a similar result must follow.”

It is also evident, that the nature of our language facilitates the introduction of foreign words. Without the homogeneity of the Greek and German, and with little power of growth from its original elements, it cannot, either by composition or derivation, make any great addition to its vocabulary. In order to express a new idea, or a delicate modification of an old one, it must generally divert from its ancient meaning some word which it already possesses, or borrow a foreign

one. It is made up of such a variety of foreign elements, which often cohere so loosely as seemingly to have no vital union, but only a mechanical juxtaposition, that it is difficult to tell where the liberty of appropriation ends. It may be asked, if we have not the right to coin or borrow words with the same freedom as the English? Undoubtedly we have; but it is a right which we should exercise with the same caution, and under the same limitations. If a new word be needed to express a new thought, or a nice shade of thought; if it be formed according to the analogy of the language; or if, the idea being a foreign one for which our language has no substitute, we therefore borrow a foreign word to express it, no just objection can be made. "Purism," says Menzel, speaking of the German tongue, "is praiseworthy, when it teaches us to express the same idea which a foreign word expresses, as comprehensively and intelligibly by a German word; but it is to be rejected, when the foreign word is more comprehensive or intelligible, or when it signifies an idea entirely foreign to our language."

In all languages there are to be found provincialisms, vulgarisms, cant phrases, and the like, which are not chargeable to the negligence of scholars, because these peculiarities are entirely beyond their control. Neither is the existence of them a proof of general degeneracy or looseness of speech, because they have been found from the earliest times, and among the most polished nations. How the English provincialisms, as to their extent and distinct character, compare with those of other European nations, we do not care to inquire; but we have supposed they were not less marked, and differed not less widely from the authorized national standards. It is a singular fact, that in a country but little larger than the State of New York, whose language has been settled for five hundred years, the people for almost as long a period having been at the head of the world in power, wealth, refinement, and learning, there should still be found a dozen provinces with dialects so distinct, that the inhabitant of any one of them can with difficulty understand his neighbor. The origin of these dialects is to be traced, probably, to the fact that the different parts of the island were early occupied by different foreign tribes; and it is not difficult to understand how, among a stationary peasantry, a dialect has been handed

down for hundreds of years essentially unchanged. Nothing is so fleeting as speech, yet nothing is so permanent. Idioms almost as remarkable as those of England may hereafter be found among the descendants of our German, French, Welsh, and Irish emigrants; although this result will be in part counteracted by the fact, that we have no peasantry properly so called, by the increasing facilities for intercommunication, and by the prevalence of education.

It is a more interesting question, how far we are guilty of abusing the language which we have inherited. Mr. Bartlett states it as his own opinion, fortified by the observations of intelligent English travellers, that "the English language is in no part of the world spoken in greater purity by the great mass of the people than in the United States." "We cannot say as much, however," he adds, "in favor of our literary dialect. The ripest scholars among us acknowledge the fact, that in the best authors and public speakers of Great Britain, there is a variety in the choice of expressions, a correctness in the use of the particles, and an idiomatic vigor and freshness of style, to which few or none of our writers can attain." If we feel constrained to assent to this remark as containing much truth, though stated too broadly, notable instances of incorrectness in the use of language are certainly to be found on the other side of the water. Indeed, it would be difficult, we think, to find in all our little phalanx of writers for the last forty years, so much bad writing as is exhibited in the really great and valuable work of the latest British historian of the French Revolution, the Consulate, and the Empire.

Without attempting a very definite classification of peculiarities, which are quite various and disconnected, we may point out some classes of unauthorized words by way of illustrating our subject. One kind of genuine Americanisms, though we are aware that they are not included in any strict definition of the term, is found in the Indian names of mountains, lakes, rivers, and states. No frequency of sibilants, no perverse combination of gutturals, can destroy the moral interest of all these names, while some of them are as musical as a lute. They are almost the only *old* things we have, almost the only relics left to remind us that human beings roamed over these hills, and floated on these waters, before the Pilgrims landed at Plymouth. Massachusetts and Ohio,

Monadnock and Monongahela, Seneca and Oneida, Huron and Ontario, are sonorous and beautiful words; they are as precious as an inheritance of gold. We wish the good taste which preserved these mementos of departed tribes had been extended a little farther. Much as we venerate the first president of our country, the original Indian name would please us far better than Mount Washington; but pardoning that, we come almost into the region of the ridiculous, when, in the same group, we find Mount Adams, Mount Jefferson, and Mount Lafayette.* The mighty Himalayas would thank no foolish geographer for calling their peaks Marlborough or Wellington; and Popocatepetl and Chimborazo would shrink from their grandeur under the poor appellations of Cortez or Pizarro. As a mark of better taste, we are glad to notice that in many parts of the country the Indian names are beginning to be revived, in spite of the statute of limitations claimed against them by the modern titles. Horicon almost takes the palm from Lake George; Onion river (what Egyptian priest worshipping leeks and garlic — what emigrant on its banks, who wept when he remembered Wethersfield — what satiric rogue afflicted with ophthalmia — gave to so beautiful a stream a name so odorous?) has nearly yielded to Winooski.

In providing names of towns, our countrymen have exhibited remarkable ingenuity, and seem to have nearly exhausted the nomenclatures of all other ages and countries. We have Jericho and Bagdad, Hebron and Sharon, and Babylon and Sodom; we have Rome, Alexandria, Athens, Canton, Cairo, Mexico, Peru, Delhi, and China; we have Ox-bow, Painted Post, Paw Paw, Mud Creek, Penn Yan, and White Oak. We have Brownsville, and Edwardsburg, and Hillsdale, and Jonesborough, and Blissfield, and Cassopolis. We have all battlefields, from Thermopylæ to Waterloo; all warriors, from Alexander to Tecumseh; all poets, from Homer to Barlow;

* The White Mountains were early called the Crystal Hills, which, though perhaps more poetic than the name they now bear, does not distinguish them from similar hills, and has not the definiteness nor the peculiar associations of the native appellation. In a ballad on *Lovewell's Fight*, we find the following musical stanza, which introduces the Indian name.

"Then did the crimson streams that flowed
Seem like the waters of the brook
That brightly shine, that loudly dash,
Far down the cliffs of Agiochook.

all lawgivers, from Solon to Houston ; all orators, from Cicero to Crockett. Nor can we stop here.

“Now the Mexican war is over,” to quote from Mr. Bartlett, “we shall doubtless have a large fund of names to use in our newly acquired territories, and the new States at the West. The old generals of the Revolution will be passed by, and the span-new heroes of this war will be handed down to the admiration of posterity in the metamorphosed shape of cities, towns, and villages yet to come into existence. As the simplicity of the revolutionary period no longer remains, the plain surname will not answer nowadays ; but the love of glory and the love of magniloquence may both be gratified in such euphonious compounds as Quitmanville, Pillowtown, and Polkopolis.”

One class of words, sometimes charged upon us as Americanisms, consists of those which have grown obsolete in England, while they have been retained in this country ; or which have here preserved the old authorized meanings that have gone out of use in the country of their birth. Many decayed gentlemen, who centuries ago lost caste at home, followed our fathers across the Atlantic, were hospitably entertained, and in return have done us very good service. We have sometimes been blamed for adopting a new word ; then, the word having been found among English writers, we have been scolded for claiming the honor of producing it. This, as Mr. Pickering shows, was the course pursued respecting the verb to *advocate*. First reproved for using it at all, we were next, the authority of Milton and Burke being found in its favor, warned not to plume ourselves on the pretended improvement, and at once to withdraw our “unfounded claims to discovery.” The late Dr. Porter remarks on this criticism, that though “we sometimes *coin*, or *introduce*, a new word, we never *discover* one.”

Progr^{ess}, as a verb, has received a good share of criticism. Perhaps it has not the best modern authority, but it is not an Americanism. It is found in the old writers accented on the first syllable. Mr. Bartlett gives illustrations from Shakspeare and Ford. Milton too, in his tract on the Reformation in England, has this clause : — “progressing the dateless and irrevoluble circle of eternity.” This is said to have been a Devonshire peculiarity, from which county came many of the early settlers of the American colonies. Mr. Gifford, in his

edition of Ford, acknowledges it as one of the words lost to England, but which, having crossed the water, have been retained by the English race in America. We recently heard of a singular instance of the preservation of the ancient meaning of a word. A farmer in one of the interior towns of New England, who had recently lost his wife, called upon a lawyer of the place for advice under his bereavement, remarking that "he wished to express a proper *resentment* on the occasion." This we find to be very nearly the meaning in which the word is used by Barrow, Cudworth, Bull, and other writers of their times. The following examples exhibit it: — "First by expressing such a hearty *resentment* of the excellence of piety." Cudworth, *Int. Syst.* p. 25. "Throughout this excellent song, the sacred virgin expresseth a deep sense of her own unworthiness, and upon that account, a profound *resentment* of the singular favor of the Almighty bestowed upon her." Bull, Vol. I. Sermon. 4.

Another class of words, charged upon us as Americanisms, we derive from English provincial usage. Such are *expect* for *suspect*, *reckon* for *think*,* and *guess* for *suppose*, which is so used in Kent and Derbyshire. We do not mention this to excuse our perversion of good words, but would cheerfully second Mr. Bartlett's somewhat energetic warning against the dangerous "tendency to banish from common use a number of the most useful and classical English expressions, by forcing one word to do duty for a host of others of somewhat similar meaning. If not checked and guarded against in time, it will corrode the very texture and substance of the language, and rob posterity of the power of appreciating and enjoying those masterpieces of literature bequeathed to us by our forefathers, which form the richest inheritance of all that speak the English tongue."

A larger class of Americanisms is formed by giving a new use, or new meaning, to old words. Among them are *clever* for *good natured*; *desk* for *pulpit*, the distinction between the two being marked in the following quotation, — "What we want for our security is, that the voice from the *pulpit* may concur with the voice from the *desk*;" and *improve* for *occupy*, or *employ*, as "Ann Cole, a person of serious piety, living in

* On one occasion, we heard a preacher infer from Rom. VIII. 18, ("For I reckon,") that Paul was a great mathematician, because he *reckoned*! This, however, is an exegetical, rather than a rhetorical illustration.

Hartford, in 1662, was taken with very strange fits, whereon her tongue was *improved* by a demon to express things unknown to herself," (Mather's *Magnalia*.) *Solemnize* for *to make serious*, long condemned as a clerical fault, has spread wide through the country, and has even been admitted into the later English Dictionaries. We are reluctant to allow this valuable word to be perverted from its legitimate signification, but we find its new meaning sanctioned by a writer so sensitive to the delicacies of language as De Quincey, and it is reported to have been so employed by one of our orators, who is as much distinguished for purity of diction as for manly and vigorous eloquence. *Transpire* for *happen* is a bad usage, because by making synonymes of words with meanings so distinct, it deprives us of the power of expressing that delicate shade of thought which the former word, as shown by its etymology, would indicate. *Temper* in the sense of *passion*, or *irritation*, is used by the English with just the opposite meaning; — e. g. "Hook was nearly engaged in a duel, in which transaction, from first to last, he showed equal *temper* and spirit;" — hence, too, the derivatives *temperate*, *intemperate*, &c.

But there is a graver view of the subject. The importance of preserving our language in its purity and strength cannot be easily overestimated. This is a responsibility of educated men, from which they should not shrink, and which they should never forget. It can do no harm to learn the opinion of our author respecting the fidelity of one class of professional men to this trust.

"The greatest injury to our language arises from the perversion of legitimate words, and the invention of hybrid and other inadmissible expressions, by educated men, and particularly by the clergy. This class is the one, above all others, which ought to be the conservators rather than the perverters of language. It is nevertheless a fact which cannot be denied, that many strange and barbarous words, to which our ears are gradually becoming familiar, owe to them their origin and introduction; among them may be mentioned such verbs as *to fellowship*, *to difficult*, *to eventuate*, *to doxologize*, *to happify*, *to donate*," &c.

It is something more than a figure of speech which ascribes life to a spoken tongue. Even as the body, by mysterious vital forces, is ever assimilating to itself the crude and dead

material which it receives, and at the same time is throwing off the decaying and useless, so language, which is the living body of thought, is ever renewing itself; is ever flowing, yet permanent; ever changing, yet the same; unlike what it was, yet never losing its identity; and he who studies it wisely must not treat it as a production of mechanism, which may be dissected and put together again according to the humor of the mechanic, but as a vital, organic product of profound sympathies, sentiments, and reflections. Some men, even those of considerable learning, have dealt with our language as if it were a mere thing, mangling its orthography, congealing its freedom under icy restrictions, shaping it according to whim or caprice, cutting off or gluing together with the coolness of a carpenter, as if entirely incapable of appreciating the affection with which we cling to authorized forms of speech and idiomatic phrases, and destitute of the true historical feeling which regards language in its growth, and as the "incarnation of thought." That was a fine burst of enthusiastic indignation at the abuse of the English tongue, which prompted the criticism of De Quincey upon Keats, though one might judge unfairly of the poet from this quotation separated from the attendant, earnest, sympathizing and deserved praise.

"If there is any thing in this world," he says, "that next after the flag of his country and its spotless honor, should be holy in the eyes of a young poet, it is the *language* of his country. He should spend the third part of his life in studying this language and cultivating its total resources. He should be willing to pluck out his right eye, or to circumnavigate the globe, if by such a sacrifice, if by such an exertion, he could attain to greater purity, precision, compass, or idiomatic energy of diction. This, even if he were a Kalmuck Tartar, who, by the way, *has* the good feeling and patriotism to pride himself upon his beastly tongue. But Keats was an Englishman; Keats had the honor to speak the language of Chaucer, Shakspeare, Bacon, Milton, Newton. The more awful was the obligation of his allegiance; and yet, upon this mother tongue, upon this English language, he trampled as with the hoofs of a buffalo. With its syntax, with its prosody, with its idiom, he has played such fantastic tricks as could enter only into the heart of a barbarian, and for which only the anarchy of chaos could furnish a forgiving audience. Verily it required the Hyperion to weigh against the deep treason of these unparalleled offences."

We can neither understand our language, nor become masters of it, unless we study it historically. We speak of it sometimes as a compound tongue; but we have a very erroneous idea, if we suppose that the Saxon, Danish, Norman, French, Latin, and other elements were shaken together in some strange crucible, and finally poured out good English; though it is the harmonious union and interpenetration of these various elements which render our native tongue so powerful, so rich, so plastic, so full of beauty. Languages are not so formed. Mysterious in their origin and growth, they are the organic product of thousands of minds, of most varied tastes and capacities, acting through a long course of years, perhaps of centuries, in ten thousand thousand circumstances and relations, upon ten thousand different materials.

We are therefore jealous of pretended improvements, even in orthography, to say nothing of the abominations of phonotypy. We have no right, literary or moral, to treat our language with indifference, or contumely, or caprice. For, first, it is the treasury of a literature richer in some of its forms than any other people ever produced. In it is preserved the wisdom of our fathers, and the spirit of a nation grander than Rome, of orators as patriotic as Demosthenes, yet broader in their sweep of thought, and more humane in sentiment, of poets not second to Homer and Sophocles, of a religious faith such as Socrates never dreamed of. It comes to us hallowed by a thousand associations, tinged with hues caught from the radiant glories of that manly, vigorous, poetic, chivalric life which history has not begun to be weary of portraying, and some of whose mightier elements tragedy has not yet gathered into her garner. Its words are strong and rigid as iron; they are flexible and pliant as the willow. They soar to the transcendent height of the epic; they march along in the dignified tread of history; they fail not in the subtlest speculations of philosophy; and only seem to halt, if anywhere, in the region of vagaries and dreams. They are sufficient for the prose of Taylor, of South, of Hooker, of Burke, of Hall; and in all the affairs of practical, energetic men, they allow no superior, no equal. Now their music swells in the organ tones of Milton; now entrances us in Spenser's "notes of linked sweetness long drawn out;" now murmurs in the plaintive melodies of Cowper; is now wild and fitful like an

Æolian harp ; now rich, grand, resounding, like the harmonies of a lofty choral anthem. Our language, to vary the figure, stands like an ancient and venerable temple, sombre with age, yet cheerful with the varied lights of sunrise and noon-day, that cease not to play upon its surface. How many great and good have wandered in its "long drawn aisles," and worshipped beneath its echoing arches ! All that remains of thousands, for whose existence we give daily thanks, lies here. Some of its buttresses have fallen, some of its oratories are neglected, and the grass has overgrown its pavements in some deserted corners ; but it is every day enlarging its walls, to meet the wants of the new generations which flock to it, and are enfolded within its ample embrace.

And it is not spoken by effete nations, by a people shattered and dispirited, worn out and lying down to die. Every zone and both hemispheres are familiar with it. It is the mother tongue to men whose homes are on the dark Atlantic and the smiling Pacific, on the shores of India and China, of New Holland and New Zealand ; of a people not multitudinous and semi-barbarous, like the unwieldy masses of central Asia and the Celestial Empire, but enlightened, conservative, energetic, Christian, in the full maturity of life and strength ; over whom, if true to themselves and to God, coming centuries may yet roll, and their power not begin to wane.

Once more, and chiefly, should we guard well this rich, this invaluable inheritance, because of its close connection with our various welfare as a nation. It is in some sense a conservator of the national character. That people cannot be wholly degraded whose dialect is ample, delicate, and supple. Especially do a people spread over broad territories need this centripetal force to preserve them one. Heart beats with heart among those whom the subtle, mysterious, mighty bond of a common language links closely together. Their sympathies are one ; they have sung the same songs, have sat at the same firesides, have learned of the same masters, have kindled their lamps at the same shrine ; and this too, though oceans roll between them and different zones contain them. The dweller in the Indias remembers affectionately, reverently, the little parent isle whose tongue is his, whose fame in letters as well as in arms is partly his. The dwellers in the far, far West cannot be wholly separated

from their parent stock on the rough Atlantic slope, so long as both speak familiarly of the same orators, poets, and historians; so long as a common language compels them to have so many common sympathies. It was, indeed, this very circumstance, the speaking of one and the same tongue, which, in the wars between ourselves and England, gave even in the apprehension of the common soldier the deepest horror to the strife; for when the fight was done, and victors and vanquished were mingled, no barrier of an unfamiliar speech kept them apart; the thirsty asked for water, the hungry for bread, in words familiar to the homes of both; — to shoot a Hessian was not like shooting an Englishman. English and Americans — they were, after all, brothers, children both of the same benignant mother; and war never put on so terrible a visage as when it made them foes.

If people are so strongly united by these innumerable cords, then, on the other hand, will they become disunited as these bands are relaxed or sundered. From the confusion of tongues at Babel followed of necessity the dispersion of the race; and wherever a similar experiment is repeated a similar result will follow.

It is, moreover, a fact established by the concurrent testimony of history and philosophy, that the corruption of the language of a people is accompanied or followed by their general degradation in character. Language follows pretty closely the fortunes of its masters. "From errors in words to errors in things the road is short." Hence, too, he who rescues an important word from abuse, who restores its true and full meaning in the public estimation, may do more for the welfare of his country than he who gains a battle; and he who degrades or perverts a single important word may do more for its injury than even a tyrant. It is the remark of Milton, that "it ought not to be thought a matter of small importance, whether the language of a people be pure or corrupt, and what is the character of their daily speech; since, whenever a language becomes inaccurate and vicious, the degeneracy of it will soon be followed by the downfall of the state, and a degraded and inglorious condition; — for when there is a lazy or licentious use of words, with ignorance or carelessness of their genuine meaning, is not this one plain mark of a people unprincipled and sluggish, and full ready

for some slavery or other? But on the other hand, there never was empire or state, which did not flourish more or less, so long as the people dutifully cultivated their language and upheld its character."

ART. V. — *Nineveh and its Remains ; with an Account of a Visit to the Chaldean Christians of Kurdistan, and the Yezidis, or Devil-Worshippers ; and an Inquiry into the Manners and Arts of the Ancient Assyrians*. By AUSTEN HENRY LAYARD, Esq., D. C. L. New York : George P. Putnam. 1849. 2 vols. 8vo.

MORE than twenty-two centuries ago, when the Ten Thousand Greeks, after the unfortunate battle at Cunaxa, were beginning their memorable retreat along the east bank of the Tigris, they crossed the Zabatus a little above its confluence with the former river.

"There," as one of their number informs us, "was a great deserted city, the name of which was Larissa. In the olden time, the Medes inhabited it. The breadth of its wall was twenty-five feet, its height a hundred feet, and its circumference about seven miles. It was built of bricks, but the under part of it was of stone to the height of twenty feet. When the Persians subdued the kingdom of the Medes, the Persian king besieged this city, but was not able to take it. An eclipse of the sun took place,* however, which caused the besieged to abandon the city, and thus it was taken. Near this city was a pyramid of stone, the breadth of which was a hundred feet, and its height was two hundred. Upon it were many of the barbarians, who had fled thither from the neighboring villages." *Anabasis*, III. 4.

Xenophon evidently knew but little about the history of this uninhabited city, on the heights of which the frightened country people took refuge as the armed Greeks passed by. But it is probable that he described its appearance faithfully ;

* We adopt the conjectural reading, ἡλιον δὲ σελήνη προκαλύψασα ; for the common reading makes nonsense ; and if we preserve νεφέλη instead of σελήνη, the question arises, what was there in so common an occurrence as that of a cloud passing over the sun to terrify the inhabitants.